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SUNDAY READING.

ON THE

A C R A M E N T

OF THE

L O R D ' s S U P P E R .



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On the SACRAMENT, &c.

HOW comes it that so many persons who go regularly to public worship, nevertheless do not attend at the Sacrament? Are they right or wrong in turning their backs on this solemn ordinance? It is a question well worth considering, and is the intension of this tract to clear up, in some measure, this important subject.

I believe the principal reason which many people have to give for not receiving the Sacrament, that they are afraid of it. "I think it an awful thing," say they, "to receive the Sacrament. I am afraid lest I should eat and drink my own damnation." To such persons we reply, have you ever acquired into the real meaning and nature of what you so much dread? Read the present tract. Learn to understand what the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is, and when you know, then decide whether

ther you will receive it or not. Let me here remark also, that the phrase of "eating and drinking of our own damnation" is a phrase extremely misunderstood. It is borrowed from the Apostle Paul, when the Apostle used it he applied it to certain Corinthians who got drunk at the Sacrament; and it is material also to observe, that by the word "damnation" the Apostle meant "condemnation" and you will find, if you will read the passage, that he alluded chiefly to certain judgments* in the world which the Corinthians brought upon themselves that even in their case he did not mean to declare, that there would be no room for repentance in this world, and no salvation in the next. must be owned in like manner, or rather it ought to be solemnly insisted on, that every one who now communicates unworthily encreases his guilt rather than promotes his salvation; but still he does not sin past all possibility of forgiveness; and it be remembered, that a man may sin not only by communicating unworthily, but also by refusing to communicate.

On the manner in which CHRIST appointed the Sacrament of the LORD'S SUPPER.

The best means of knowing what is the true nature of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, is

*For this cause (namely because ye eat and drink to your own damnation or condemnation,) many are weak and sick among you.

quite into all that passed when our Saviour appointed it. We read, with little difference of terms, in several of the Evangelists, that our Saviour "on the same night on which he was betrayed, being at supper with his Disciples, took bread and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you. This is do in remembrance of me. Likewise also, the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new Testament in my blood which is shed for you." The Apostle Paul further observes, "For as often we eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." From this short and simple account, which is nearly all that Scripture says on the subject, we are to collect what is our Saviour's intention in appointing this sacrament.

Now I think we are to understand, that he there meant to command all Christians to meet together, from time to time, and to partake of bread and wine, in order to keep up among them the remembrance of this his last supper with his Disciples, and of the sufferings and death of Christ, which immediately followed. "Take eat," said he, after giving broken the bread, "this is my body." That is, this broken bread is to remind you of my body broken for your sake. And speaking of the bread he said, "Drink ye all of this, for this is my blood of the New Testament which is shed for you for the remission of sins." That is, this cup is to remind you of my blood being shed for the remission (or remission) of sins. "Do this in remembrance

brance of me." These last mentioned words may be understood both as an entreaty and as a command. Christ your Saviour entreats you thus remember him. Christ also, who is your judge and Lord, commands you to do it. The command is as plain as any other command of Scripture; and he who disobey one command of Christ may, with much the same reason, disobey every other. It is, in short, as if our blessed Saviour had said, "I am now about to die for your sins, and to rise again for your justification, and I make it my last dying request that you, and all my Disciples who accustom yourselves to meet together, and to partake of bread and wine, as we have now done, as a token of your bearing in mind my painful and bloody death, and in token also of your believing that I, who am now about to be crucified, shall hereafter come again, according to my promise, in power and great glory." "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come."

What it is to receive the Sacrament unworthily.

First then, I think it is plain that to receive ignorantly, is to receive it unworthily. This is very properly be called "not discerning the Lord's body." Gross ignorance or error concerning the nature of the Sacrament, evidently shews a man to be unfit at present to receive it, and gross ig-

ence of the doctrines of christianity is in like manner a disqualification. This ignorance, however, that which should immediately be cured. Every person who is come to years of discretion should be afraid of remaining a stranger to the Lord's table. He should lose no time in enquiring into the nature of it, and when he understands it, he is no more to be excused for absenting himself from it, than he is for absenting himself from the common public worship.

But next I would observe, that to receive the sacrament in any respect, lightly and carelessly, is to receive it unworthily. Some receive the Sacrament as a thing of course as soon as ever they arrive at a certain age; and at this same age perhaps they go and plunge themselves into all the vanities and follies of the world, if not into its vices also. Some receive it because they have a grave character to support; some because they are expected to receive it, and are ashamed to refuse to do so, saving, for instance, a brother or a sister who receives it from whom they do not care to differ; some from mere zeal for their own church, of which they shew themselves steady members by receiving the Sacrament according to the forms which it has appointed; some from a confused mixture of several of the abovementioned motives; and some for the mere purpose of qualifying themselves for a place under government. Thus, while many seriously disposed persons need to be encouraged to come to the Lord's table much more than is their custom, it is to be feared also, that there are not a

few

few of our Communicants who in one way or other receive the Sacrament very unworthily.

Again, to receive the Lord's Supper superfluously, is to receive it in some measure unworthily. Now a man receives it superstitiously when he thinks there is some charm or unaccountable virtue in it, and who is not content with believing the Sacrament to be a means of Grace, in the same manner as Prayer or the reading of the Scriptures or attendance on public worship. The papists go so far as to adore the elements of bread and wine, which they also fancy that the priest is able, by his consecration, to turn into the real and literal body and blood of Christ: and there are some Protestants who have not entirely escaped from the same error for they fancy that there is some dark and mysterious meaning in the Sacrament, which however they cannot explain; and they are not aware that it is that plain and simple thing which we have described it to be. I am sorry to add, that some superstitious Protestants imitate the Papists in another respect. They think that they have done a very meritorious deed when they have received the Sacrament; they have gone through what they call their religious duty, and in consideration of this they fancy that they have now obtained a right to employ themselves in any manner they think fit, and away they go from the Lord's table into the world with minds full of ambition, or pride, or covetousness, and the very Sacrament which they have attended serves to confirm them in the neglect of daily and habitual repentance, and to give a daily

erous and false peace to their consciences. There are persons of this description who prepare themselves possibly with much solemnity for the day of receiving the Sacrament, and who even attend the service with a face of great sanctity and seriousness. It must, nevertheless, be laid down as a maxim, that whenever any one's life is quite at variance with every thing he professes at the Lord's table, that person must be considered as a mere hypocrite and self-deceiver, and as one of the worst and most unworthy sort of Communicants.

On the Self-Examination that is proper before we determine to receive the Sacrament.

St. Paul, after reproving the Corinthians for their profanation of the Lord's Supper observes, "but let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup." In the Catechism of the Church of England we are instructed, what it is that may now be particularly required of Communicants; namely, "that they should examine themselves whether they repent them truly of their former sins, stedfastly purposing to lead a new life; whether they have a lively faith in God's mercy, through Christ, with a thankful remembrance of his death, and whether they are in charity with all men?" Let every one then examine himself on these several heads, and more especially when he is for the first time about to communicate.

communicate. Here, however, while we war the carelesfs not to be too flight in their self-examination, let us alfo caution the ferious not to be too fevere. It is not required that a man fhould have become free from fin, nor that he fhould even have reached to fome great heights in religion, before he ventures to the Sacrament; for the Sacrament itfelf fupposes us finful creatures, and is intended to cheer us with the hope of pardon through that death of Chrift, which it fets before us. Reader! if your heart is full of pride, covetoufnefs, or impenitence, and unbelief, or you are carried away by the love of the world and are cold and indifferent about religion; or you are habitually given to any deceit or fraud, or to any fecret wickednefs, approach not to the Holy Table; but if the fins I have fpoken of are the very things which you hate, and if the mercies God in Chrift, are the fincere defire of your foul then doubt not that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is intended for fuch perfons as you, however weak your faith, and however fmall your prefent attainments.

On the difpofitions which we fhould feel at the time of communicating.

The Lord's Supper was ordained “for a continual remembrance of the facrifice and death of Chrift and of the benefits which we receive thereby.” The benefit

benefits which we receive from the death of Christ, are therefore one of the chief subjects on which we should reflect when we are approaching the Table of the Lord. We should consider that we are now about to commemorate the death of that Savior who died for us, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God:" "who was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, and the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and by his stripes we are healed." "All we like sheep had gone astray; but the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." Let it never be forgotten when we go to the Table of the Lord that we should go thither in the very character of sinners. "In this respect there is no difference, for all have sinned, and come short of the Glory of God." "being justified freely by his Grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, that he might be just, and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus." Christ is that Lamb of God, a Lamb "without blemish and without spot," which has been offered up as a bleeding sacrifice, and "which taketh away the sins of the world." "Take, eat, this is my body, which is given for you," and "this is my blood which is shed for you for the remission of sins." Unto him, therefore, we are to look, and through the exercise of this faith in Christ, and not "through our own works or deservings," we are to hope for pardon. "There is, therefore, now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit." "Therefore, being justified

tified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." Such are some of the thoughts concerning our Savior's death, as well as the blessed effects of it, which the Scriptures teach us to indulge, and which are more peculiarly proper at the time of receiving the Sacrament.

On the Character and Conduct which becomes us after having received the Sacrament.

Presuming the Reader to be a Member of the Church of England, we will here more particularly remind him of a few passages in the Sacramental service provided by our Church. In that service we are supposed to say "We do not presume to come to this thy Table, O merciful Lord! trusting in our own righteousness, but in thy manifold and great mercies." Now have we been sincere in uttering these words? Let us beware then how we afterwards talk of the innocence of our lives and the goodness of our hearts, and how we boast of our character and our honor as worldly people do; let us take care that we never put any part of our confidence in that righteousness which we have professed in those words to renounce. Humility, meekness, patience towards others, loving kindness and charity, a disposition to forgive injuries and to take reproofs without anger, contentment with our lot, and submission under the afflicting hand of Providence, all these are tempers which cannot fail to arise out of an habitual sense of our unworthiness,

worthiness, and they are the tempers therefore which become a Communicant; nor is there any doubt that every sincere Communicant will find these tempers encrease in him through his frequent attendance at the Lord's Table.

Again we are supposed, by another part of the service most humbly to declare, "We do most earnestly repent, and are heartily sorry for these our misdoings. The remembrance of them is grievous unto us, the burthen of them is intolerable." But how false and hypocritical should we suspect ourselves to have been in these words, if we seldom afterwards feel any sorrow for our sins, if we neglect the duty of habitual repentance, and if we pretend that Christ will save us, or that the mere Sacrament will save us, without our feeling in our hearts any great hatred of iniquity. Let us therefore never think, after we have pronounced those words, that sin can be counted too great an evil, that temptations to sin can be too much avoided, that repentance can ever be too deep or serious, or that things in this respect can, as the world imagine, be ever carried too far.

Once more—we are supposed at the end of the service each of us to declare, "and here we offer and present unto thee ourselves, and souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy, and lively sacrifice unto thee." Do we then indeed and in truth thus devote ourselves to God? To have said these words, and to have repeated them again and again at the Sacrament, is to have done little. By these words it is meant, not only that a solemn service should

should be performed, and that a momentary feeling should be expressed, but it is intended also to imply that we purpose actually to employ all our powers and faculties, whether of body or of soul, our time, our wealth, our abilities, and our influence in the cause of our Maker and our Redeemer for "we are not our own, but are bought with price;" A life really laid out in the service of God is therefore to be expected in a communicant. To redeem each precious moment of our time, to employ it in whatever is our most proper and most urgent work, to shake off our natural indolence and sloth, and to go from the Lord's Table into scenes of diligence and usefulness: thus to join together the love of God and of man, and to be active as well as to be devout, is to be consistent in our character as Christians.

If then we have attended at the Table of the Lord, "let us not forget to go good, and to do tribute;" for these also are "sacrifices which God is well pleased." Let us not only pour out our hearts in prayer, but let us also employ our active powers in the Lord's service. "Let us be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord." Let us "keep under our body, and bring it into subjection." Let us command our passions, and restrain our tongue. Let us also be punctual in our engagements, upright exemplary. Let us be "zealously affected in every good cause;" and while we "visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction," let us take equal care that "we keep ourselves unspotted from the world."

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